4/5/74

(death of Bernard)
Kinsella's Tain

4/5/74

(Edward & [illegible]
Llywelyn)

'dregs of Trojans'

C/o the Little Company of Mary
Calvary Nursing Home
~~Harrow on the Hill~~ Sudbury Hill
Middlesex, England
Evening, Sunday ~~Sat.~~ May 4th 1974

Dearest René

Forgive the enclosed boring rigmarole about Llywelyn & Edward I. – Don't bother ~~the~~ wade ~~through~~ through it – it just rambled on owing to yr mention of the 'Mabinogi of the Four Branches' – once one starts speaking of a thing it calls up many many other things. One could go on for ever. Bits about Welsh (& Irish) history cause me to crack on like dear Laurie G. used to at a mention of mules. Indeed in that bit from ~~the~~ Bk of Balaams Ass where Emeritus Nodens of the 2nd Adjutrix (p.98) begins on the camels, I actually meant to ~~say~~ write "O! Cripes he's commencing on the mules – this hostility to man, the peculiar ~~aversion~~ & perfection,"

I really write this as a covering note to ~~let~~ let you know, unless, as I expect, you have heard the sad news that dear, very dear, Bernard Wall died on Thursday May 2nd. ~~Bernad~~ His daughter, Bernadette, phoned me I think on Friday evening to ask the sister if she could speak to me and I went to the phone & heard the distressful news It seemed impossible for he came over with Kathleen Raine only a few days back & also when you were here, did he not? I knew of course that he had been suffering from a bad gastric ulcer but understood that was under control & getting better. And on the Monday morning following the Sunday evening at the Mermaid Theatre at which you spoke & although I did not speak with him, he told the sister to tell me how greatly he enjoyed & found admirably done it had been. Especially he liked your contribution. I thought you might like to know that. Bernadette said he (or is it Bernardine) was taken ill quite suddenly & had to be taken to hospital and apparently pneumonia ~~set~~ in ~~&~~ was, ~~the cause of his~~ in his case the cause of death. This seems so often to happen, I mean a person may be suffering or had been suffering from something ~~[illegible]~~ or other but ~~[illegible]~~ then contracts pneumonia and dies of it.

Bernard was one of the very few people for whom I felt the closest sympathy and respect. I never felt his perception, ~~[illegible]~~ ability & ~~his~~ learning were appreciated sufficiently, ~~so~~ I was glad that The Times gave him, in Friday's issue, at least some of the honour he deserved — well, God rest him and one feels that the Respond is, in his case, no mere formula et lux perpetua luceat ei. Harman when he hears the news, will be very greatly upset, I fear. For they had, of late years, become very close.

Well dearest René, this postscript to my wearisome over long ~~[illegible]~~ rambling letter on Welsh stuff is a sad postscript but I feel I must write this sad news, in case you chanced not to have had it from some other source.

Two other people I know, who were at the Mermaid thing & each ~~was~~ particularly complimentary about what you had to say.

It was heavenly to see you & talk again with you. Many, many, thanks for your visit.

I believe I told you that Petra & one of her daughters (I think it was Charlotte — anyway she was pretty nice, but I thought Charlotte was ~~very~~ fair-haired — of course I'd not seen her since she was a child.) ~~Who~~ was that great big chap who came with you one day? It is ~~Saturday~~ Sunday evening now, so you can't get this at the earliest till ~~Monday or~~ Tuesday or Wednesday.

An Irishman whose name I could not read sent me via Kathleen Raine, a translation by Thomas Kinsella of ~~the~~ Táin Bó Cuailnge published by Ox. Univ. Press in Association with The Dolmen Press Dublin. paperback, 283 pages. It is very fully annotated & Notes to the text, 3 maps & an attempt to give a pronunciation list of Irish words, ~~Introdu~~ ~~[illegible]~~ Introduction etc. an Introduction and is a remarkable piece of scholarship. It was published as a Special Edition in 1969 by Dolmen Press Dublin. And I remember now that they asked to make

an inscription for the cover with just the title, but I had to refuse because of my confounded eyes which are worse now. I've been able so far to read only parts of it. It is an astonishing work. Glorious things in it, but of such fierce barbarity that only here & there can one feel its ~~[illegible]~~ magic. At least, my first reading of parts of it seemed as ice-cold as the Nordic sagas except that it has a 'phantasy' that lends it grace; whereas those Scandinavian Eddas & Sagas feel to me unmixed frightfulness. Snorri Sturlason (spelling?) Heimskringla is almost 'Nazi' in its horror. — & the same lack of humour. Of course it's pretty hopeless not being able to read the original Icelandic text. And I imagine ~~the~~ The Táin must have felicities of linguistic form that of necessity are absent from an English translation. Certainly & most positively in Welsh-Celtic fragments the splendour of the complex & most highly skilled metric (even when the 'content' is of blood-shedding, treachery, & foul deeds) ~~[illegible]~~ lends a felicity that just can't be rendered into English. But to return to this translation of Táin Bó Cuailnge, it's a splendid effort. There are a number of illustrations that, as far as I can see, are not reflective of the epic text. They are by Louis le Brocquy.

①

℅ The Little Company of Mary
Calvary Nursing Home
Sudbury Hill Harrow-on-the-Hill
Middlesex

Die Jovis Maius 4.

Dydd pedwar o fis Mai
Post Nat. Xt. MCMLXXIV

Dearest René

Thank you so much for yr letter that came this morning & for the previous one of a few days back telling me of Joan's sprained ankle. please give her my best love & great sympathy – for I do know the pain & swelling of a true & proper sprained ankle – not to be confused with a strained one in fact as you know it was a brute of a sprained ankle that got me into trouble at New Barracks Limerick. And I managed to sprain it again in London in about 1940. Lord! it was a treat to be able to talk with you again – And you looked exactly the same as you had years & years ago. Thanks for telling me the literal meaning of gleich-schaltung – by a bit of luck it would appear I landed on the right word I mean the word ~~[illegible]~~ covering a greater ~~diversities with [illegible]~~ number of diversities than I had thought – & chancing to be very fortunate in the context, I used it with some hesitation as the only word I could ~~think~~ of. The English language is not very good at expressing in one word a combination of ideas – is it?

I'm so glad you liked

~~Gw~~ Gwanwyn yn a llwyn
abor axed yn abour side. etc

In the A-S. Dream of the Rood it does speak of ~~[illegible]~~ axeman felling the tree at the holt-edge. – and I've long wondered if the marvel of O.E. poetry was in any way 'influenced' by the Vexilla regis ~~and~~ never told by a chap a little back that it was now considered pretty certain that there was a link-up between the Dream of the Rood and the somewhat earlier Latin Vexilla regis & the ~~[illegible]~~ Crux fidelis.

Yes. the 'Mabinogi of the Four Branches' ~~(Pedeir Keinc~~ (Pedeir ④ Keinc (branches) y Mabinogi in Middle Welsh spelling) consitute the mabinogi proper. The other 'tales' ~~chwedlau~~ (Chwedlau) in Lady Guest's translation are from varying sources & were, I think, put together because they were in MS form found in the 'Red Book of Hergest.' The term Mabinogion was given to these very varied tales as an intended plural, I understand that there is no such plural in Welsh, but now that it has gained currency since 1846 or so it is convenient & that I suppose is why the Jones brothers in their new translation some years back kept to the title The Mabinogion, though they did exclude the ~~Taliesin~~ Taliesin tale that is the last tale in Guests' Mabinogion. I have not with me here the Brothers Jones translation, but if my memory is right they give their reasons for this. Anyway it's a late composition & is confusing because there ~~was~~ is genuine material of the real Taliesin, a poet of the period of Aneirin's Gododdin or ~~just~~ a trifle earlier. Urien of Rheged whose kingdom ~~was~~ was roughly from the south-west lowlands of Scotland ~~to~~ to the northern parts of England – with Carlisle, maybe, his chief stronghold.

Yes, the 'mabinogi of the four branches' · Pwyll, Branwen, Manawyd~~dan~~* & Math are, as you say, Irish in feeling, being Xtianized versions of a common celtic prehistoric theophany so necessarily share Irish Celtic near parallels. Moreover the Dessi of south-east Ireland occupied what is now Pembrokeshire & its Welsh name Dyfed is derived from these Irish Dessi, indeed not only south West Wales but deep into ~~Brecon~~ Breconshire Irish dynasties were founded in the break-up of the Roman imperium. But

I dont know the reason but when one writes Môn one puts a circumflex accent over the ô which lengthens it, but if one writes Ynys Fon (the island of Môn) one leaves out the circumflex accent.

I suppose to be quite accurate it should be entitled: The Mabinogi of the Four Branches and other ~~Welsh~~ early Welsh Tales.

the aw rhymes with 'cow'. The Roman called the Isle of Man Monavia Insula & Ynys Fon (Anglesey) Mona Insula. This initial Mon- caused confusion later on. Bede speaks of the 'Menevian Islands', meaning both Môn & Manaw

* In Lady Guest's translation this name was spelt Manawyddan but more recent scholarship gives Manawydan. It is ~~the~~ Welsh form ~~Manannan~~ of the Irish ~~Manan~~ Manannán mac Lir. The Welsh name for the Isle of Man is Manaw (or Mannaw)

3

Slowly the Goidelic Celtic was assimilated into Brittonic Celtic. Dyfed is certainly strongly associated with the Mabinogi proper. There is as you know an Ogham stone on Caldy Island. Moreover Culhwch ac Olwen has ~~[illegible]~~ not dissimilar Irish tales; yet in the case of that great ~~[illegible]~~ chwedl, whatever its prototypes, is fixed with exact topographical ~~topographical~~ details & the route of the hunt can be followed from when the Great Boar & his brood came ~~[illegible]~~ ashore at Porth Cleis (near St Davids) right across South Wales ~~to~~ the Darren & Nant Honddu then driven into the upper Severn & ravaging the Dumnonian peninsula to the sea near Lands' End, we know that the story of Culhwch was already part of the native tradition when Nennius was writing his Historia Brittonum early in the 9th century, by some chance indirect reference.

The Peredur, yes, that, & The Lady of the Fountain & Geraint son of Erbin belong to a new world altogether. Full-fledged Romance cycle. None the less Peredur is not a copy of the European Romance tale of Sir Perceval nor are the 'Lady of the Fountain' ~~nor~~ 'Geraint son of Erbin', but tales reshaped in Welsh form but obviously closely related to French & German courtly romance. The thing emerges clearly I think is that in these 'Welsh' Romance Tales there is a generalizing — never the exact & traceable on the map of the native deposits. Bits of the native stuff push up here & there of course. But we are far, very far removed from the "primitive" wonder-filling set down to earth sureness when Urien Rheged & his son, Owain who fought against the Northumbria Angles and besieged for three days & three nights the Angle force ~~at~~ Traeth Metcawd — Lindisfarne just off the shore of Northumberland opposite Bamburgh Castle — late in the 6th century AD.

INVIDIA

★ I recall making the journey once with Nikky G. & Helen & others staying at Rock. I remember Nikky cut her foot on some sharp thing below the water, we were just about on the firth shore of Holy Island. It was regarded by Helen as a pilgrimage to St Cuthbert's Isle but I was thinking of the great ~~North~~ British Gwledig or King, Urien Rheged & his all but successful raid against the Angles who had secured ~~on~~ the island ~~[illegible]~~ a bridgehead to the mainland. Urien was at the point of triumph when he was murdered by one of his allies, Morcant ✗. At low tide you could walk across the sand — well, two miles, you could walk across the sand — I've made the two but the water was just over your feet & ankles — I've made the paddle more than once when staying at Helen Sutherland at Rock near Alnwick.

✗ not the first or last of Celts whose inroads (the word used by Nennius) brought ruin to our land.

When Urien turns up in the ~~Romances~~ Romances, as King Uriens of the land of Gorre & his son Sir Ywain de Galles.

Geoffrey of Monmouth is almost entirely responsible for all this. His Historia Regum Britanniarum was first 'polished' or a copy known of it to an abbot of Lord in I think ~~[illegible]~~ Brittany or Normandy. ~~by~~ ~~in~~ c. 1140 or before, ~~c.~~ 1136 and by ~~1200~~ the end of the century had caught on in courtly circles, first in France then Germany the most of the West. But whereas Geoffrey's tale was mainly to make a kind of Æneid for the ~~King~~ ~~At~~ Angevin empire, it was as romance literature that it held the field from Chrétien de Troyes onward to Wolfram von Eschenbach & Hartmann von ~~Aue~~ Aue, Walter von der Vogelweide etc. to the ~~Romances~~ romancies, Esyllt & Drystan was already in ~~Ch~~ — only soon after 1200. Fine, ~~then~~ these ~~Celtic~~ basically Celtic deposits, Irish ~~or~~ Welsh had given Europe a Romance literature between 1200 & 1300 ~~that~~ is still the main theme worked when we use the words European Romance. But the effect of the works of Geoffrey, archdeacon of Llandaff, had a curious ~~affected~~ ~~effect~~ & disastrous effect on the native deposits of Wales ~~& I expect to~~ some ~~[illegible]~~ ~~[illegible]~~

for his Latin Historia Regum Britanniarum was quickly translated into Welsh & had its influence on virtually all subsequent Welsh tradition. So that scholars have to take a very sharp ~~Sharp~~ look at Welsh materia poetica to be sure it has not been messed about with by Geoffrey's part-fictional & part-reliable stuff. For example, 'King Arthur ~~or~~ others may be said in the older deposits to have held their 'courts' at various named sites but after Geoffrey it was at 'Caerleon-on-Usk', because that was the site named by this remarkable and renowned ~~[illegible]~~ Geoffrey. The trouble for scholars is that Geoffrey no doubt had access to traditions of Wales & Brittany & used them as it suited him, and only the most careful & detached scholar ~~[illegible]~~ can be certain of the extent this or that passage contains a perhaps important residual truth or is an ~~an~~ invention & a very misleading invention at that.

Geoffrey of Monmouth had little effect on the court poets of the Princes, say from 1100 to the fatal year of 1282. For the bardic rules for metric and content were extremely ~~[illegible]~~ ~~Conservative~~ conservative. It was not till later that Geoffrey stuff would have affected them.

The 'tale-tellers' were of another strata of that highly graded quasi-tribal quasi-feudal society.

(5)

Geoffry

Some things that he stated that were dismissed out-of-hand by scholars as just futile inventions of this confounded 12th Cent. 'historian' have turned out to be, under disguised Latin or quasi-Latin form, possible & vy probable *nomina*. He wrote his 'best-seller' for readers versed in French & Latin, so Welsh or other forms would require a certain amount of dressing-up. Even passages the ~~*~~ *Mabingi of Branwen* are thought by some scholars to have traces of Geoffrey.

But we need not suppose a special credulity on the part of Welshmen, for it is astonishing to what extent Geoffrey's work had on diplomatic & such like power-politics not only did Llywelyn princeps ~~Walliae~~ Wallie and his brother the Lord David in November 1282 and their Concil in the fastnesses of Snowdonia to which the Franciscan ~~pater~~ friar, John Pecham, Archbishop of Cantebury ventured, against the wishes of the King, Edward I, in a last attempt to negotiate a peace between the King and the Welsh leaders – it was a brave ~~&~~, arduous & tricky attempt – he made arrangements lest he should come to death or grave misfortune in his mission. When he came safely to the *princeps* & his brother he brought with him a ~~personal~~ general proposal ~~that~~ the King would have nothing less than the submission of the Welsh leaders and those under their command, he also brought secret offers ~~to~~ addressed to the Lord Llywelyn princeps Wallie & his brother the Lord David.

The Lord King offered to Llywelyn a Earldom in some part of England and would provide the funds necessary to the station of an Earl holding his lands directly of the Crown.

The 'secret' offer to the Lord David was of a more severe nature, & no wonder, for he was already a peer of ~~the English realm and it was~~ his ~~[illegible]~~ ~~[illegible]~~.

furious & sudden action in successfully ~~[illegible]~~ carrying by storm the castle of Penarlâg (Gladstone's Hawarden) — on Palm Sunday in ~~[illegible]~~ March of that same year, and taking also other castles in that north-east corner of Wales. He was driven to this unfortunate action on account of the insolence of the King's officials & their interference within the lands ~~over which~~ he held sway & owed ~~any~~ allegiance to no one but the King. He was married to Lady Ferrers and had two sons & one daughter, Gwladus.

whether by prearrangement or by one of those sudden & furious risings of the Welsh, men in south West Wales had risen & destroyed castles held by the crown or by anglophil ~~Welsh~~ Welsh lords.

The answers conveyed to the Archbishop of Canterbury ~~[illegible]~~ by Llywelyn & David were ~~both~~ dignified and firm refusals, the nature of these replies enraged the Archbishop & he placed ~~[illegible]~~ Llywelyn under interdiction and apparently his council & all adherents to what ~~he~~ regarded as direct rebellion against ~~[illegible]~~ the King, the ~~[illegible]~~ lawful Overlord

Llywelyn's refusal was mainly that providence had placed him, ~~[illegible]~~ whether he liked it or not, in the position of *princeps* of his Welsh subjects especially those of his lands of Ynys Fon (Anglesey) Arfon (which means over against Môn) & all Gwynedd (that includes the Llŷn peninsular) and de jure east to the river Dee, actually he had been forced by Ed. after the war of 1277 to abandon claims to the four Cantrefs of Gwynedd lying between the Dee & the Conwy though these four Cantrefs were in fact part of Gwynedd & called Gwynedd-is-Conwy or Lower Gwynedd.

He said I am in no position but to defend my people & retain my position as prince ~~of the~~ and lawful successor of the princes & Kings of the House & Dynasty of Aberffraw (a royal seat on the south ~~[illegible]~~ shore of Anglesey)

For many, many centuries my forbears have had keeping of this land, land that Brutus the Son of Aeneas gave to us when he came

⑦ ⑦

from Troea!

David's answer was more light-hearted in spite of the deadly position he knew he was in. ~~he said he understood~~

The King had said that he must leave the shores of this Island & go as a crusader to Palestine & not return until the Crown demanded it. ~~permitted it.~~ ~~To it~~ The Archbishop would be ward of ~~this~~ children during his absence.

To this David replied that he understood that to go on crusade, involved some religious compunction or desire but that he had no such inward feelings and could not take upon himself this project from an earthly King. Moreover as a *princeps* of the same dynasty as The Lord Prince, his brother, he had much need to be a protector of his people.. or words to that effect.

The main point in Llywelyn's refusal (& also in Davids to a ~~con~~ lesser degree) was that he was a *princeps*, a status granted him by Henry III & with the ~~consent~~ agreement of the Holy See in the person of ~~the~~ Legate (Ottobuono,) at the *Curia regis*. He could not & would not be treated as ~~a~~ a mere baron for, just as a rex had privileges & status above ~~the~~ the nobles of his realm, so was a *princeps* an especial status & that was in keeping within the structure of the feudal society of the age, apart from the ~~sacred~~ sacral, immemorial, heritage & binding (Cy~~fraith~~ ~~codes~~ (codes of law) ~~of~~ customs of the Cymry. Come what may it was impossible for him, without outrageous disgrace, to do more than thank the

— Cant spell it. but I think it was one word something like : Ottobuono

Cyfraith

King and the Archbishop, but to wholly reject their proposals.

I have mentioned above on the previous page, Llywelyn's allusion to Caer Droea and to appeal to the Trojan descent of his line of rulers.

And indeed one of Edward's officials in ~~Ital~~ Italy at Orvieto I think, when after the killing of Llywelyn by the Mort~~imers~~ a month only after ~~this~~ these 'negotiation' in Snowdonia on November 10th — exactly a month ~~[illegible]~~* and a day, on the Feast of St Damasus Pope the Friday ~~[illegible]~~ before the ~~Feast of~~ vigil of S. Luciæ Virginis et Martyris, when the clerks of the King's ~~Wardrobe~~ Wardrobe in Italy made a regular mafiking of the news: 'Gloria in excelsis Deo, the last of the race of traitors is killed, 'the dregs of the Trojans'. 'God bless our noble King & his glorious soldiers' etc. — & recall how Shakespeare makes Pistol say to ~~Fluellen~~ Capt. Fluellen as he eats the leek 'Base Trojan, thou shalt die.'

Henry V
Act V
scene 1
last line

Yet, the English too, adopted this Geoffrian yarn of ~~[illegible]~~ the Brutus ~~son~~ of Aeneas. For Edward I in claiming the Kingdom of Scotland wrote to the reigning Pope Boniface (VIII?) ~~saying~~ using ~~that~~ this same fiction of Geoffrey as showing the rightfulness of the claim and as late as the 16th Cent. the Mathematician, ~~[illegible]~~ geographer & Astrologer, John Dee, advised Elizabeth I to claim all islands or lands north of Scotland as by right, for in Geoffrey of Monmouth King Arthur was emperor of all those seas & 'Alban' was used as an eponym. Incidentally John Dee is said to have coined the description 'British Empire'.

We know absolutely nothing more for certain than that — We know that Llywelyn had left David in command of Snowdonia & had come unopposed south-east across Wales as far as Llanganten *That he heard Mass sung by a Cistercian monk — and that later on that same day he was wounded & in the hands of the Mortimers and that he asked for a priest and that he was decapitated by Mortimer — whether already dead of his wounds or still living is an open question.

Archbishop Pecham in a letter to Edward says that Lady Maud Longes~~pee~~pee — Llywelyn's Cousin, had asked Pecham to give Llywelyn Xtian burial, Pecham told the King that he would go into the matter before deciding.

Lucy's Feast was & still is on Dec 13th.

I think it was Roger(?) Lestrange, Castellan of Montgomery Castle who ~~mentions~~ mentions S. Lucij die in his hurried ~~[illegible]~~ dispatch to Edward at Rhuddlan with the news that 'the Lord Llywelyn & the flower of his army' was destroyed en le paes de Bueet', i.e. in the County of Buellt, Cantref ~~[illegible]~~ ~~[illegible]~~

the chief of the King's barons of the March.

Llangarten is in Breconshire but I suppose ~~[illegible]~~ well over 20 miles north of Capel-y-ffin

i.e. St. Mary's Church in Cantref Buellt now called Builth Wells

*Actually it was the high ground round about Llanganten where Llywelyn had halted in force and heard Mass sung by a Cistercian priest on the [illegible] of Dec. 11th and then went with a few attendants ~~down~~ down to the lower ~~ground~~ ground where the river Irfon flows & a bridge of some sort led to the town of English held Llanfair ym Muallt.